

mean by avoiding her? And why was he leaving New York? There was a tiny pucker at her brows while she gave the finishing touches to her toilet; but when she went down to dinner her cheeks glowed with ripe color and her eyes were shot with tiny sparkling fires.

AUCTION bridge followed dinner. In the cutting Cort and the Baroness were out of it, and when Cort and the Baroness cut in Camilla and Perot cut out. Fate conspired, and it was not until late in the evening that Cortland and Camilla found themselves alone in the deserted library at the far end of the wing. Camilla sank back into the silk cushions of the big davenport wearily.

"I played well tonight," she said. "I believe even Billy is pleased with me. I did have luck, though, shameful luck!" She stretched her arms above her head, sighing luxuriously. "Oh, life is sweet—after all!"

Cortland watched her. "Is it?" he asked quietly.

"Don't you think so, Cort?"

"There's not much sweetness left for me in anything. I've got to go away from you, Camilla."

"So you said," and then airily, "Goodbye!"

He closed his eyes a moment. "I want you to know what it means to me—"

"Then why do it?"

"I—I've thought it all out. It's the best thing I can do—for you—for myself."

"I ought to be the judge of that."

His dark eyes sought her face for a meaning.

"It's curious you didn't consult me," she went on. "I hope I know what's best for myself."

"You mean that you don't care—my presence is unimportant. My absence will be even less important."

"I do care!" she insisted. "What's the use of my telling you? I'll be very unhappy without you."

He shook his head and smiled. "Oh, I know—you'll miss me as you would your afternoon tea if it was denied you; but you'll do without it."

"I'm quite fond of afternoon tea, Cort," and then more seriously, "Are you really resolved?"

"Yes," he muttered, "resolved—desperately resolved!"

She threw herself away from him against the opposite end of the couch, facing him, and folded her arms, her lips closed in a hard line. "Very well, then," she said cruelly, "go!"

It seemed as if he hadn't heard her; for he leaned forward, his head in his hands, and went on in a voice without expression. "I've felt for sometime that I've been doing you a wrong. People are talking about us—coupling your name with mine—unpleasantly. God knows what lies they're telling! Of course you don't hear, and I don't; but I know they're talking."

"How do you know?"

"My father—"

"Oh!"

"We quarreled; but the poison left its sting."

Camilla laughed nervously,—the laughter of a woman of the world, hard, cynical, a little noisy,—and it grated on him strangely. "Don't you suppose I know?" she said. "I'm not a baby. And now that you've ruined my reputation you're going to leave me. That's unkind of you. Ah, don't worry," she laughed again. "I'll get along. There are other friends, I suppose."

He straightened and turned toward her sternly. "You mustn't talk like that!" he said. "You're lying! I know your heart. It's clean as snow—"

"Because you haven't soiled it?" She clasped her hands over her knees and leaned toward him with wicked coquetry. "Really, Cort, you're a sweet boy; but you lack imagination. You know you're not the only friend in the world. A woman in my position has much to gain—little to lose. I'm a derelict, a ship without a Captain—"

He interrupted her by taking her in his arms and putting his fingers over her lips. "Stop!" he whispered. "I'll not listen to you!"

"I mean it. I've learned something in your world. I thought life was a sacrament. I find it's only a game." She struggled away from him and went to the fireplace; but he went and stood beside her.

"You're lying, Camilla," he repeated, "lying to me! Oh, I know—I've been a fool, a vicious, selfish fool! I've let them talk because I couldn't bear to be without you, because I thought that some day you'd learn what a love like mine meant. And I wanted you—wanted you—"

"Don't you want me still, Cort?" she asked ardently.

HE put his elbows on the mantel and gazed into the flames; but wouldn't reply, and the smile faded from her lips before the dignity of his silence. "I've thought it all out, Camilla. I'm going away on business for my father, and I don't expect to come back. I thought I had won you, until I saw you today; but now it's harder than ever."

He looked up as he thought she might misinterpret his meaning. "Oh, I'm not afraid to leave on your account. Our set may make you a little careless, a little cynical; but you've got too much pride to lose your grip, and you'll never be anything else but what you are." He gazed into the fire again and went on in the same impersonal tone as if he had forgotten her existence. "I'll always love you, Camilla. I love you more now than I ever did—only it's different, somehow. It used to be a madness, an obsession. Your lips, your eyes, your soft fingers, the warm, elusive tint of your skin—the pearls of the bud—I could have taken them because of their beauty, crushed out if I could the soul that lived inside. As now I wish to make its sweetness sweeter." He sighed deeply and went on. "I told you I loved you then, back there in Mesa City; but I lied to you, Camilla. It wasn't love. Love is calmer, deeper, almost invisible, more mental than

physical even. I'm going away from you because I love you more than I love myself."

"Oh, you never loved me," she stammered. "You couldn't speak coldly like this if you did."

He raised his eyes calmly; but made no reply.

"Love—judicial!" she went on scornfully. "What do you know of love? Love is a storm in the heart, a battle, a torrent; it has no mind for anything but itself! Love is ruthless, self-seeking—"

"You make it hard for me," he said with an effort at calmness. "Let me lie if I like, Camilla."

"You're not lying," scornfully. "You know I—I need you—and yet you'd leave me at a word!"

"I'm going—because it's best to go," he said hoarsely.

"You're going because you don't care what happens to me."

He flashed around unable to endure more and caught her in his arms. "Do I look like a man who doesn't care? Do I?" he whispered. "If you only hadn't said that—if you only hadn't said that!"

NOW that she had won she was ready to end the battle and drew timidly away; but with Cort the battle had just begun, and, though she struggled to prevent it, he kissed her as he had never done before.

excitement with which she had fed her heart for the last few months had suddenly stretched her nerves to too great a tension. She had been mad, cruel, to tantalize him—and she had not realized what her intolerance meant for them both until it was too late.

He misunderstood the meaning of those tears, and petted her as if she had been a child. "Don't, Camilla! There's nothing to fear. I'll be so tender to you, so kind, that you'll wonder you could ever have thought of being happy before! Look up at me, Dear—kiss me! You never have, Camilla! Kiss me and tell me you'll go with me—anywhere!"

But as he tried to lift her head she put up her hands and with an effort repulsed, broke away from him, and fell on the couch in a passion of tears. She had not meant this—not this! It wasn't in her to love anyone!

IN the process of mental readjustment following her husband's desertion of her she had learned to think of Cort in a different way. It seemed as though the tragedy of her married life had dwarfed every other relation, minimized every emotion that remained to her. Cortland Bent was the lesser shadow within the greater shadow, a dimmer figure blurred in the bulk—a part of



"There's Room in My Own Empty Heart for You Both."

"You've got to listen to me now, Camilla. I don't care what happens to my promises—to you, or to anyone else! I'm mad with love for you! I'll take the soul of you! It was mine by every right before it was his! I'll go away from here; but you'll go with me—somewhere where we can start again!"

In that brief moment in his arms there came a startling revelation to Camilla. Cort's touch, his kisses, transformed him into a man she did not know. "Oh, Cort! Let me go!" she whispered.

"Away from all this where the idle prattle of the world won't matter," he went on wildly. "You have no right to stay on here, using the money he sends you—money—money he stole from me! He has thrown you over—dropped you like a faded leaf. You're clinging to a rotten tree, Camilla. He'll fall. He's going to fall soon. You'll be buried with him—and nothing between you and death but his neglect and brutality!"

In his arms Camilla was sobbing hysterically. The

tragedy, but not the tragedy itself. For a time he had seemed to understand, and of late had played the part of guide, philosopher, and friend; if not ungrudgingly, at least patiently, without those brutal outbursts of petulance and temper in which he had been so difficult to manage.

She cared for him deeply, and lately he had been so considerate and so gentle that she had almost been ready to believe that the kind of devotion he gave her was the only thing in life worth while. He had seemed to pass over the many opportunities she offered him to take advantage of her isolation, and she was thankful that at last their relation had found a happy path of communion free from danger or misunderstanding. While other people amused and distracted her, Cort had been her real refuge, his devotion the rock on which she tied. But this! She realized that what had gone before was only the calm before the storm—and she had brought it all on herself!

He watched her anxiously, waiting for the storm to